Harry Potter and the Sacred Text 3.13 - Gryffindor Versus Ravenclaw – With Hank Green: Rivalry

Vanessa: Chapter Thirteen: Gryffindor Versus Ravenclaw.

“It looked like the end of Ron and Hermione’s friendship. (Intro music begins) Each was so angry with the other that Harry couldn’t see how they’d ever make up. Ron was enraged that Hermione had never taken Crookshanks’s attempts to eat Scabbers seriously…”

Vanessa: I’m Vanessa Zoltan

Casper: And I’m Casper ter Kuile

Vanessa: And this is Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.

(Intro music fades)

Casper: This week’s story comes from a very special guest: Hank Green. You may have come across him on Vlog Brothers or the podcast, Dear Hank and John, and the many, many other projects that Hank has going on. Because Hank shared this week’s story on the theme of rivalry and we got straight into the conversation, we’re going to switch it up, get ready, and do the 30 Second Recap right up top. Vanessa, are you ready?

Vanessa: You’re going first.

Casper: Oh god no.

Vanessa: Also I like how you introduced the switching it up, like it’s the most exciting thing that’s happened to you since 1998.

Casper: I just feel like we’ve been going a year, and this is the first time we’re doing this.

Vanessa: Yeah. On your mark, get set, go.

(Ticking noise)

Casper: Okay so Ron and Hermione are still bickering over the pets. Harry gets the Firebolt back, it’s very exciting; Madam Hooch is like, “oh it looks great.” Okay but then we’re on the pitch: Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw, and the weather is out like “suns out guns out.” And who else is out, oh my god it’s Cho Chang. She’s so beautiful, like she’s trying to block Harry instead of chasing it herself. But then he finds it and then pretends and then gasp Dementors and then he catches it and everything is great. Whew.
Casper: I just got distracted by Cho.

Vanessa: You have a thing for Quidditch players.

Casper: I don’t care what they look like, who they are, what gender; I’m just like, “as long as you’re good on the broom.” Vanessa, I may have missed a couple of things…

Vanessa: No!

Casper: So I’m relying on you to…

Vanessa: Flawless.

Casper: Okay here we go.

Vanessa: You are Beyoncé.

Casper: 3, 2, 1, lemonade.

(Ticking noise)

Vanessa: So Ron and Hermione are still fighting and it’s terrible, and then Gryffindor is going to go against Ravenclaw. Everyone’s really jealous, including Draco, of the Firebolt. And so then the game happens and Harry thinks that there’s a Dementor and so he, “Expecto Patronus,” and has a Patronus and then it turns out that it was just Draco playing a prank. And then Ron goes up to his room and he falls asleep and then he’s like, “Sirius Black just tried to attack me,” and everybody’s like, “no you’re wrong,” and he’s like, “no go ask Cadogan,” and Cadogan’s like, “yep I let him in.”

(Buzzing noise—106 words in 30 seconds!)

Casper: Because Neville had left that little piece of paper with different password lying around.

Vanessa: Did he? Neville doesn’t know where that piece of paper is, but did Neville leave it somewhere?

Casper: That, my dear fellow readers, we will have to find out in a future episode.
Vanessa: But now, let’s listen to this amazing story from Hank Green on the theme of rivalry. Hi Hank!

Hank: Hi!

Casper: It’s a real thrill for you; well it’s a thrill for us for you to be here Hank.

Hank: It is very nice to be here, you have a very good podcast.

Casper: Well thank you so much, and we’re very excited to hear your story on this theme of rivalry.

Hank: Well it goes a lot of places, but I promise I will get there. So I’m going to tell you a story about middle school.

Vanessa: Our favorite kind.

Hank: Yeah everybody’s favorite time of their life, 6th grade. This is like, in America, I’m eleven or twelve years old and every day I arrive at English class and for some reason, for what I assume has to do with teacher schedules, the teacher shows up about five minutes after the kids are supposed to be there. So there’s these five minutes of just kids, no supervision, and every day this guy, Aaron, punches me one time in the stomach…

Casper: What?

Hank: Every day. Sometimes it’s like surprise punch, some days it’s not a very hard punch, sometimes it’s a very hard punch, and occasionally, very occasionally, he won’t punch me at all, just to keep things mixed up. And all day before the class, I’m thinking about it: whether it’s going to happen, whether it’s not going to happen, whether it’s going to be worse than usual or better than usual. And thinking back to this period in my life, I have this sensation that at that moment in sixth grade, I had forever been punched in the stomach every day and would forever be punched in the stomach every day. Like I don’t remember the first time this happened, I just remember the feeling of perpetual punching. Anyway, fast-forward to seventh grade: so I return back to school from summer vacation having grown like six inches, my voice is half an octave lower. And Aaron, as it turned out, had already gone through his growth spurt and I now am inches taller than him.

Vanessa: Yeah!

Hank: And I outweigh him by a lot. I’m still terrified of him, because for me it wasn’t about size it was about this was a puncher and I am a punchee. But he is suddenly much nicer to me, and I actually remember at one point, him being like, “no hard feelings.” But I didn’t ever feel like…he could have kept punching me and I would have never fought back, it had been set up in my
brain. Anyway, a while after seventh grade, some friends of mine started a pick up hockey game, I really like hockey, this is Florida so it’s roller hockey on like a basketball court on concrete and I start going and then later, Aaron starts showing up and I’m terrified because hockey is a pretty physical game. We play pretty rough, we don’t wear pads, it’s on concrete, it’s not safe, I don’t know what we were thinking…

Vanessa: And he’s a puncher.

Hank: And he’s a puncher. He’s the puncher and I’m the punchee. And so I feel like during this period of time, one of the things that is making me better at hockey is the fact that Aaron is on the other team and I want to be better than him at something. Like mostly I don’t want to be better than I currently am, the thing that’s driving me forward is this kid who I still have this huge hang up on, even though it’s been more than a year since he bullied me and he’s been pretty friendly ever since then. And I don’t feel that friendliness at all. So one day, this is finally…that was all background, this is the actual story: Aaron gets mad because it’s hot and you get mad and that’s the culture of the game. He throws his stick, it hits me in the abdomen and I think, even at the moment, I knew that he didn’t really mean to hit me but it was almost like I had been looking for the moment and I just rush him and I hit him and at this moment I probably outweigh him by 50 pounds and he like flies off his skates, lands flat on his back, and he hits his head on the ground. And everybody is like, “Hank is not that kind of guy. Why did this just happen?” Aaron is also very confused, he’s bleeding, and everyone is like, “dude that was way over the line.” And it took that moment to realize that for years the power had already shifted and that it wasn’t the situation it was before, I had thought that he was still the bully but we were just at that point rivals. Like we were trying to get better at hockey, we were trying to win a game, we had an adversarial relationship a little bit, but it wasn’t the thing that I thought it was anymore.

Vanessa: So much in that story strikes me, that to some extent a rival or an enemy can set the standards that you hold yourself too. When you said that you didn’t want to be better than yourself, but you wanted to be better than him. It’s like well if he wasn’t very good, that wouldn’t have pushed you forward at all, and if you are too much obsessed with somebody who you see as a rival you can really let them determine the way that you live your whole life.

Casper: Yeah, but also the transition, from like, the bully relationship to a rival relationship, which is different, because a rivalry suggests a more equal footing, in a way. And it’s so hard to feel that when you’ve been bullied, that someone else might see you as an equal now. That’s really hard to believe about someone sometimes.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: So that strikes me too.

Hank: It’s also something that I was thinking about because Malfoy is such a terrible human, but thinking that like how does Malfoy imagine his relationship with Harry? Understanding that
Aaron was imagining my relationship with him differently. Does Malfoy, in some weird, broken way, feel abused by Harry Potter?

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Woah.

Vanessa: I mean, that’s the other thing that’s so interesting about you and Aaron is that you both imagine that the other person had more power than either of you actually had.

Casper: And there’s this great moment in this chapter where Harry has one of the best zingers to Malfoy ever, like I just love this moment where he’s like, “Oh pity they can’t attach an extra arm to your broom Malfoy, then it could actually catch a snitch for you.”

Hank: As I was reading that I was like, how many arms does a normal broomstick have?

Casper: But you’re right, it’s not as if Malfoy is the only one throwing around insults here.

Vanessa: Well not only that, when Harry and Malfoy first meet...

Casper: Yeah.

Vanessa: to some extent, they first meet in the robe shop, but their first intentional interaction, Draco puts out a hand of friendship to Harry and Harry rejects him.

Casper: That’s right.

Vanessa: I mean Harry rejects him for sort of good reasons because Draco is being mean to Ron, but Draco’s first attempt to interact with Harry is really extending that hand of friendship.

Casper: Yeah. Hank have you had examples in your life of rivalries becoming like a productive relationship? Or something where it’s lifted you both to a higher ground in someway?

Hank: I will say, I’m going to not answer your question by answering a different question, I have had rivalries that I thought were rivalries that weren’t: that it was one sided and it was just me. And I’ve had rivalries that ended in very sad ways: where I was like, I thought I was competing with this person because they sucked, they made bad decisions and they did bad things and I was aware of it and I wanted to beat them at whatever game it was—whatever life-thing we were doing. And then in the end it turned out that it wasn’t about them verses me, they were doing nasty things because they were broken people. And then they either went to jail or they made huge mistakes and struggled with addiction, or those things, that once you’re 36 you see all of the people who you didn’t like because they had done bad things, often turns out that even the ones that are successful—like I have an example of a guy that whatever “successful”
means, he’s made much more money than me, but he is also very, very sad. And also lost what I think is probably more important than money, which is respect—like no one cares anymore.

Casper: It feels like that competitive spirit, or that rivalry relationship can be really productive within a set boundary. Like I’m just thinking about that book about Lincoln’s Cabinet, *Team of Rivals*, that there were relationships there which were very competitive but then could also be human together, right? Like there were times to be prodding each other and times to be in friendship and I just think of politics today, like all we have is competition, like we don’t have collaboration. We need both, in a way.

Vanessa: And in this chapter, we see this very much with Cho, like Cho is literally forcing Harry to go faster…

Casper: Yes.

Vanessa: And the bob and weave. But then its Cho who points out to Harry that there are Dementors down at the bottom of the field.

Casper: Right.

Vanessa: So she knows when to be like, “okay rivalry is over, we’re friends in this moment and something dangerous is happening.”

Casper: That’s right.

Vanessa: Growing up, so my mom and I have a huge Scrabble rivalry and my mom is a big believer in not letting me win, ever. So it looks like beating up on a kid, if you look at our scores from when I was ten and she did like 400 points and I did like 80.

Casper: Oh my god.

Hank: That’s great.

Vanessa: But she like made it this really fun thing where we weren’t allowed to talk back or swear in front of our parents, and Scrabble time was a time where I was allowed to swear…

Casper: Woah.

Vanessa: And I was allowed to trash talk. And it was the only time my mom was a big believer in like, “I’m not friends with my children, I’m a mother,” but Scrabble time was a time where we could be equals and rivals and it only got annoying when I was older and I finally beat here, and she was like, “Sweetie good for you!” And I was like, “no, be mad! We’re rivals!” She just upended all the power.
Hank: Yeah don’t be happy for me, exactly. Yeah there’s kind of a bit of a patronizing nature of someone being happy for you when you beat them, after you’ve been working so hard and losing and not being happy for them when they win.

Vanessa: No it was super insulting.

Hank: I mean, it’s interesting the difference between the amount of tension, like I’m obviously very driven forward by creative people who are creative in the same spaces as me. And there are occasionally moments when I’ll listen to a song and I’ll be like, “that is exactly what I wish I could do.” And I will just never be able to write a song like that, and it will push me to write differently or to think differently about music, or think differently about music theory. But I rarely feel like I am in confrontation or antagonistic relationship with those people.

Casper: Right, unless it’s Celine Deon and then you just feel crushed by her brilliance. That’s how I experience it.

Hank: I mean, I do whenever the They Might Be Giants album comes out I put it in the stereo with the knowledge that I’m going to feel bad about my song writing skills, but also very good about my enjoyment of the content.

(Sacred Reading theme music plays)

Casper: Vanessa, it’s time for our Spiritual Practice and we are returning to Sacred Imagination, and Hank was able to join us as we dove into this paragraph from the chapter. So I’m going to close my eyes and I’ll listen to your reading.

Vanessa: Okay so this is a conversation between Lupin and Harry and so I would invite you to pick which character you really want to imagine yourself into or go back and forth because it’s a dialogue between the two of them. So it starts:

“That was some Patronus,” said a voice in Harry’s ear. Harry turned around to see Professor Lupin, who looked both shaken and pleased. The Dementors didn’t affect me at all!” Harry said excitedly. “I didn’t feel a thing!” “That would be because they—er—weren’t Dementors,” said Professor Lupin. “Come and see—“ He led Harry out of the crowd until they were able to see the edge of the pitch. “You gave Mr. Malfoy quite a fright,” said Lupin. Harry stared. Lying in a crumpled heap on the ground were Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, and Marcus Flint, the Slytherin team Captain…

Vanessa: So as you were listening to that, what were your thoughts? What did you imagine as Harry or Lupin?
Casper: I was imagining myself as Lupin and I was so conscious of wanting to gently let Harry know what had happened. It was kind of letting him down because he’s so confident and I just imagine myself trying to be really compassionate and I noted that the language Lupin is using is still very positive, “you gave him a real fright,” like he’s trying to lift him up. I don’t know, I just feel like this mix of pride and also humor, it’s also kind of funny, yeah.

Vanessa: Hank, what about you?

Hank: It’s interesting, I went with Lupin as well because I’m old now, and when I first read the Harry Potter novels that was a long time ago now and now I have a child. A little boy, and someday he will be a thirteen year old and that feeling of Lupin’s surrogate fatherhood there and that Harry hasn’t had that and he’s having it a little bit here. And I think Lupin is also feeling it and it’s also this moment where you know, like I felt the jostling of bodies, like all of these people around celebrating me. And then I didn’t so much feel the feeling of like, “I’m going to let Harry down right no because he didn’t take on Dementors,” it’s more I was feeling, “I’m going to let Harry down right now because his classmates are terrible and he’s going to know that they’d do these terrible things to him.” And that’s what hit me is that I’m going to have to let you know the bad news that it wasn’t these supernatural, awful creatures, it was, in fact, awful creatures who are human.

Vanessa: Yeah, I did imagine myself into Harry and the anger and betrayal and fear that I was just humiliated. As I’ve talked about on the podcast before, my biggest fear is feeling like everybody is laughing at me. That feeling of like, “oh I thought everyone was cheering for me,” and the moment of panic of, “what did I not get? What happened?” That literally everybody saw but I didn’t see.

Casper: Yeah, both of you actually picked up on that idea of…Hank you said the jostling of bodies, this is a very physical encounter, like the whole team is running at him. And Vanessa you’re like everyone’s looking at him so he’s really at the center of things and it’s so ironic that in this moment of what should be a shared connection with the Gryffindor team, they’ve done this great thing, here’s another moment that he’s isolated. Which is Harry’s constant struggle in this whole story, is this feeling of being separate from or different than, like even in this moment of connection we’re seeing him be disconnected again.

Hank: Yeah and that’s true in Harry’s entire life, and I imagine that will be the case for his entire life that we can imagine. But that’s so the case in Azkaban, where he’s isolated and he’s controlled and no one can let him do anything because there’s this murderer out to get him, and also all supernatural demons out to get him--that they have let into this school, what the heck? This does not seem like a good plan.

Casper: Hank, you could be a coauthor in our book, Failed Pedagogy at Hogwarts: A Primer.
Hank: So we found these weird creatures that suck happiness out of people, and enjoy consuming souls. We’re going to starve them and put them around a bunch of children.

Vanessa: What do you think? Let’s have the school board vote on them? 100% yays? Great! I also wondered for Lupin, how much Harry reminded him of James? Watching Harry play Quidditch, and if he did I think that this is very much to your point as well, Hank, of how much of a paternal role he felt of pride that he had taught Harry how to cast a Patronus and also that James is never going to get to watch Harry follow in his footsteps in this way, but Lupin can. So I would imagine that this is a very emotional moment for Lupin.

Casper: It makes me think, Hank, as a dad, what has been the biggest surprise for you? What’s different?

Hank: I mean, it’s cliché probably, but it’s just the desire to just sensually experience this child. Like I want to squeeze him and kiss him and bite his legs and just look at him. And I kind of thought, because I’m a pretty analytical person, that it would be more of a, “I’m enjoying watching this being form in front of me,” but it’s way down under those levels of just like, “I just want to look at you because of how good you look to me.” And I do really like watching him do new stuff and like, “oh he’s grabbing stuff and putting it in his mouth and rolling over and sitting up and all those things,” but it’s more like I understand in a very different way now how, even if this kid can’t do it, like if Oren had like severe physical problems and could never do all the things, like never walk or something, I’d still be like I love looking at you. Everything about you is perfect and I love it.

Casper: Well he’s lucky to have you as a dad, that’s for sure. It also reminds me of how Harry longs, I love the way you said it, like sensually experience another person. He actually stops himself from fully casting a Patronus so he can hear his father’s voice. He looks at those photographs endlessly, there’s a longing for that physicality of being together.

Vanessa: In the Mirror of Erised too, he could stare into it forever.

Casper: Right, right.

Hank: Oh god, that makes me think about, because you guys were mentioning in a recent episode that he would just stare at Ginny’s name on the Marauders’ Map and that’s a different, but similar habit of his. That he just wants to look at the people that he loves.

Vanessa: And when he’s walking in the forest again, when he’s walking to his death in book seven, there’s a couple of lines about how he wishes that he could just see Ron or Hermione or Ginny one more time. That just to look at them, I mean it’s why he put photographs up, right? Ariana and I just had an interaction the other day; we work out of my apartment and I said, “look at this cute picture of my dog.” And she was like, “Vanessa you’re dog is right next to you. She’s being cute right next to you.” And I was like, “right, but she’s framed in this cute way,
here.” There is something when you love something, even a dog, there’s something about a feast to just enjoying the fact that they exist.

Casper: Well thank you again Vanessa for choosing that passage, and thanks Hank for joining us. I didn’t think we’d end up talking about parenting, but I think there’s something going on there with Lupin and Harry which is really parental in a way, that’s beautiful.

Vanessa: Which is so beautiful because Harry gets asked to be Lupin’s son’s godfather.

Casper: Oh I hadn’t thought about that.

Vanessa: So there is a real, beautiful, circular thing there.

Casper: Yeah. Hey, so Hank we know that PodCon is coming up. Tell us more about that, what is it?

Hank: It’s a convention for people who love podcasts, in the vane for the thing that I do for youtubers. So an opportunity for people who love the stuff and the people who make the stuff get together in the same place and celebrate it and do silly, fun things but all talk about some of the issues that the medium faces, and have serious conversations about the process and about where we are going. So I like to invite people who make the things, people who are the blend between the fan and the creator and also people who are just fans to actually participate in those broader discussions. So it’s happening December 9th and 10th in Seattle, Washington. So if you’re in Seattle it’ll be easier for you, but if you’re not then just hop on the train and ride it. It’s a choochoo.

Casper: The midnight train to Seattle. Thank you Hank.

Vanessa: Thank you.

Hank: Thank you, this is such a very interesting thing to do, the project that you are doing. And I think that it’s necessary in the world, just giving us all time to be contemplative, and giving us time to think about the things we love and being human.

Vanessa: Thank you.

Casper: Bye! Today’s voicemail is from Kathy Cavanaugh who is responding to our episode about optimism in chapter twelve about the Patronus.

(Beep)

Kathy: Hey Vanessa and Casper, this is Kathy and I am a counseling psychology doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. So I wanted to comment on the chapter on optimism. I
actually have a tattoo that says, “Expecto Patronum” on my arm to remind myself of the power of optimism in inspiring change. As a therapist in training, optimism is incredibly important to have not just for yourself and your own self-care, but it gives our clients permission to not only have optimism, and therefore hope that their situations will get better. Therapy is sometimes the only place in someone’s life that they have permission to be optimistic and part of my job is to make therapy sessions not only a safe place to explore our doubts and fears, but hope as well. For me, my Patronus charm is my optimism that things can get better. Anyway, I love the podcast and getting to me y’all at NerdCon was pretty much the highlight of my trip. Thanks!

Casper: Thanks so much Kathy, I really appreciate you giving us the opportunity to figure out what the difference is between optimism and hope. And the thing that strikes me is that optimism kind of is always based on fact, in some way, at least in my mind. Like hope seems something that you don’t necessarily need any signals that things are going to work out, but you can still hope for it, and usually I’m optimistic when I have good reason to be. I don’t know, Vanessa what do you think?

Vanessa: I feel like I feel differently. I feel like people talk about optimism and pessimism as if it’s a world-outlook, and that no matter what, if you’re an optimistic person or a pessimistic person. And hope seems more like something you can choose to have, and by you I mean me. Like I think I might be a slightly pessimistic person, who sometimes when faced with certain situations will be like, “but I’m going to be hopeful about this.” Doesn’t optimism and pessimism seem more like a mindset?

Casper: I mean, I think so much depends on what your experience of the world has been. And for me I’ve been incredibly lucky and privileged in so many ways so it’s easier for me to be optimistic, I think…

Vanessa: But I have too I’m just a grouch.

Casper: There you have it Kathy, that’s the answer we’ve got to. And thank you so much for the work that you’re training to do and no doubt already doing. I love that idea of therapy as a place where we can be optimistic even in difficult times. Vanessa, its time for us to bless someone from the pages of this chapter. Who are you blessing this week?

Vanessa: I am blessing Cho Chang, there are two reasons, one is because she’s short and a badass and that just speaks to me. But two, I know that I’ve mentioned it before, but just the moment in which she warns Harry that there are Dementors, and Dementors harm everybody, they make everybody feel ill, but she knows that they really impact Harry. And so rather than running for cover, rather than taking the advantage that she might get in catching the Snitch, she goes out of her way to tell Harry to watch out. And I just think that’s a really beautiful moment when you can be on an opposing team from someone and still really be taking care of them and I think it shows great priorities and sportsmanship and so I just want to offer Cho Chang a blessing for that. What about you Casper, who would you like to bless this week?
Casper: My blessing is for Lee Jordan. He’s one of the smaller characters that we come across, and what I love about him is that he’s been asked to commentate, and he’s so excited about the Firebolt like he’s talking about it and talking about it, and he’s telling everyone who else is riding Firebolts these days and who else is flying Firebolts these days. And McGonagall keeps telling him to shut up. She’s saying, “Jordan are you being paid to advertise Firebolts? Get on with the commentary.” And commentary is actually a really hard thing and so I just wanted to bless Lee Jordan for his defiant joy in sport, his total skill at being able to describe a game. I’m sure there’s some people who can’t see, who might be visually impaired in the audience, and he’s offering a real service and he’s able to extemporaneously talk about great speed for many hours and for that I give him my blessing.

Vanessa: Can we talk about the amazing comedy duo that is Lee Jordan and Minerva McGonagall.

Casper: It was designed in heaven.

Vanessa: They’re hilarious together, “Jordan! Who’s paying you?” I love it. It’s amazing.

(Outro Music Begins)

Casper: You’ve been listening to Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. Thank you to everyone to our live shows on the West Coast, we had an amazing time! And if you’re on the East Coast there’s still tickets for our shows in D.C. New York City, and Philadelphia, check out harrypottersacredtext.com and click on the big orange button. You can follow us on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook and leave us a review on iTunes. We’d also love to hear from you if you have a voicemail for us.

Vanessa: Next week we’ll read Chapter 14: Snape’s Grudge through the theme of imagination. This episode of Harry Potter and the Sacred Text was produced by Ariana Nedelman, Casper ter Kuile, and me, Vanessa Zoltan. Our music is by Ivan Pizzo and Nick Bohl. And we are part of the Panoply Network. You can find ours and other great shows at panoply.fm. This week, we’d like to thank Rebecca and Charlie Ledley, Stephanie Paulsel, and a special thanks to Hank Green; it was an absolute pleasure to have you on the show.

Casper: We’ll see you all next week. Thanks everyone.

(Outro Music Ends)

Vanessa: You made my point, thank you. Do you need me? Should I leave? Basically I think the kind of rivalry that we model on this show is the perfect amount of rivalry.
Casper: You mean where we have snipers on both each other’s buildings, looking at each other through a window?

Vanessa: Yeah.

Casper: Oh that’s just me?

Vanessa: No, no.

Casper: At least their snipers of love, they’re like pew, pew, pew.

Final Music: Panoply